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ABSTRACT

Court decisions that changed suspension procedures to be followed by principals have caused uncertainty about the extent of the principal's authority to discipline students. Suspension is, therefore, being increasingly viewed as a last resort. This newsletter groups alternatives to suspension into three main categories: student detention, intervention programs utilizing school resources as well as the courts and community agencies, and prevention techniques. The last section of this newsletter includes descriptions of alternatives to suspension programs developed in different high schools across the country. (Author/DS)

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EA

The Practitioner

A Newsletter for the On-Line Administrator

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SECONDARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

Vol. III, No. 4 April 1977

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Alternatives to Suspension

The Principal's Dilemma

Today's principal, working to resolve student discipline problems, faces a serious dilemma. On the one hand the Gallup Poll reports that the public expects tough discipline. Teachers expect the effective correction of misbehaving students as well. On the other hand, numerous court decisions restrict the options available to principals for disciplining students, and parents may hurl legal challenges at the school regardless of the nature of the offense.

Most principals have no objection to following due process procedures. They do object, however, to fuzzy definitions of these procedures, to charges that principals suspend indiscriminately, and to expectations that a secondary school can be managed without sanctions for misbehavior, including suspension as a last resort.

How then does the principal run this new maze of conflicting expectations without getting boxed in — or frozen out? With parents challenging suspensions indiscriminately how can the principal separate suspensions supported by the courts from those voided by the courts? Is it safer to avoid suspending students altogether and to look entirely to alternative solutions? If this route is chosen, can alternatives to suspension be effective in controlling student misbehavior? Finally, are alternatives just another fad, an overreaction to rumors and wide media coverage?

Court decisions did cause changes in suspension procedures for some principals. Their major impact, however, was to cause uncertainty among all principals about the extent of their authority to discipline students. Each ruling of the courts raised a new flag of caution. The *Wood* v. *Strickland* decision made the situation even worse.* Suddenly administrators could be held liable for depriving a student of his civil rights, even if the administrator didn't do so intentionally. Were principals for the first time being denied the right to suspend as a penalty for student misconduct?

* See *Legal Memorandum*, June 1975 for discussion of this and other cases dealing with suspension and expulsion.

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Decoding The Courts

The intent of the courts was not to deny a disciplinary authority to schools. All court opinions stress that ADMINISTRATORS HAVE THE RIGHT AND RESPONSIBILITY TO MAINTAIN AN ORDERLY SCHOOL CLIMATE. The courts do recognize the shared authority of the state and of the school district to prescribe and control student behavior. The question, then, becomes one of appropriate discipline within the context of due process. Another way of stating the situation is to say, "The greater the penalty the greater the requirement for due process." Thus, to be safe, many schools are issuing fewer suspensions while implementing alternatives to suspension.

A variety of techniques can be used with misbehaving students prior to invoking suspension. Suspension is being viewed increasingly as a last resort sanction. It may certainly be used but after other approaches to changing student behavior have been made except for the most serious of cases.

A recent NASSP national study affirms that the majority of schools already follow this practice. One hundred percent of the reporting schools stated that they hold conferences with students prior to suspension, except in the most extraordinary circumstances. Other procedures being used prior to student suspension were as follows:

- 86% of schools sent letters home
- 73% used some form of student referral system
- 48% used restrictions at school
- 46% used detentions
- 34% used in-school suspensions

In 93 percent of the schools, students are given in writing the opportunity to appeal adverse decisions.

Some Guidelines

Principals may use suspensions because (1) limits exist to the adjudicative process, (2) disruptive students do infringe extensively upon the rights of others, (3) students do commit acts of disruption which the school is not required to condone, and (4) the safety and welfare of students and teachers must be protected.

The physical extent of the school's authority is definable. Students can be suspended legally for acts that occur beyond direct school supervision. If the student's actions "interfere with the school purposes," or "threaten the safety and welfare of students and teachers," then suspension is justifiable. For example, students involved with drugs and alcohol off the school property have been suspended on the ground that they exposed other students to these substances. Students committing acts of violence off campus were suspended on a similar basis. These suspensions subsequently were upheld in court.

Some state codes (Alaska, California, Colorado, Florida, Indiana, Maine, New Jersey, Nebraska) indicate specific offenses for which students can be suspended. A summary of these regulations indicates four major areas for which suspensions may properly be invoked. These include:

Repetitious Misconduct

- violations of rules and regulations
- continued class disruptions
- distribution of unauthorized printed material
- forgery, false reports
- insubordination
- profanity

Disruption and Danger

- arson, theft, vandalism, destruction of property
- false fire alarms
- explosion of fireworks and explosives
- possession or use of tobacco, alcohol, or drugs
- riot, strike, walkout
- carrying or using weapons or dangerous instruments

Public Morality

- behavior inimical to the morals of other pupils
- obscene acts
- prurient publications

Attendance

- repeated class truancy
- chronic tardiness
- unauthorized absence from school

Nevertheless, a program of alternatives to suspension can be useful for principals in these and other states. Use of alternatives often will improve student behavior and thus end the need to suspend large numbers of students.

Seeking Alternatives

Alternatives range from traditional detention programs to comprehensive alternative schools. Existing programs may be classified as follows:

Detention	The traditional techniques schools use to discipline students by (1) requiring attendance during the student's free time, or (2) confining students during school time.
Intervention	Techniques schools use when student misbehavior becomes serious or repetitious rather than invoking suspension or detention.
Prevention	Techniques schools use to understand and respond to problem students before serious misbehavior occurs.

Detention

How does this most common form of discipline become an alternative to suspension?

The Behavior Clinic initiated at McKinley Senior High, Baton Rouge, La., provides after-school group and individualized counseling for disruptive students who would normally have been suspended. Sessions are held twice a week for approximately two hours. Groups are limited to 20 students. The clinic moderator, skilled in human relations and knowledgeable in behavior modification techniques, listens to students talk about their problems and, if possible, decides on solutions. The moderator evaluates student behavior and attitudes. The results provide information to teachers and administrators about the readiness of the student to "graduate" from the clinic.

Using another approach, the junior and senior high schools in the Orange, Calif., Unified School District "host" a Saturday work/study program that has reduced suspensions and saved the district money. The junior high students are placed on campus clean-up and beautification projects while senior high students have a choice between work activities or study. One junior high school saved almost $2,000 in attendance apportionment during the first 11 weeks the program was in operation.

Comprehensive in-school suspension programs such as "Sharing and Caring Crisis Center," "Time Out Center," "Continuing Education Center," and the "Educational Adjustment Center" are described later in this *Practitioner*. Their common characteristics are as follows:

- ✓ Coordination of the program by principal or assistant principal
- ✓ Extensive use of counseling services within the school and among community agencies
- ✓ Appointment of program directors skilled in behavioral techniques
- ✓ Separation of students from the regular program but with full credit allowed for classroom work
- ✓ Maintenance of small numbers of students in suspension rooms.

Intervention

Alternatives to suspension using intervention range from in-school techniques to the utilization of courts and community agencies. The degree of intervention depends upon whether the concern is for isolating the student or for working with the student's personal needs.

Wilde Lake High School in Columbia, Md., has initiated a program based on William Glasser's Reality Therapy. When a student breaks a rule, teachers as well as administrators confer with students, contract with students for acceptable behavior in the future, and have the students define the consequences of future misbehavior.

In other schools the student is placed on probation and must hold scheduled conferences with the counselor and the assistant principal. The counselor reinforces any improvement and directs communication among teachers, student, and parents.

Another approach is to use student-faculty courts. Dominican High School in Detroit, Mich., has legislated that "there will be no automatic suspensions or expulsions regardless of the offense." A lower court consisting of two elected students, two elected faculty, and one administrator handles students who violate specific rules. Students who commit acts which normally call for suspension are counseled extensively to help them develop acceptable behavior. In six years not one student has been suspended or expelled.

Community agencies are also being utilized to intervene with students. A school-community-court coordinator at Hannibal, Mo., Senior High School strengthens cooperation among school, juvenile court, and various social agencies such as family service and the mental health clinic. The coordinator's role is multifaceted; he serves as social worker, juvenile law officer, attendance officer, and conflict mediator. Students placed on probation from juvenile court report regularly to him for counseling. When vandalism, violence, or illegal possession of drugs occurs, he directs the investigation and files the necessary charges against the student. He works closely with the mental health agency when serious student-family conflict occurs. The coordinator also has the authority to see that recommendations of the court are carried out when the school is involved.

Prevention

Techniques are being developed to redirect disruptive students before suspension becomes necessary. A broad range of preventive approaches are emerging. To take advantage of preventive strategies, the principal must ask: Is the school's problem the student, or is the student's problem the school?

A school can, of course, launch new and interesting programs which will attract previously "turned off" students. For instance, Wingate High School[1] in Brooklyn, N.Y., has benefited from five new programs. They see a "complete turn-around" coming from these initiatives:

Flight Training Program

Career Program

Basic Skills Minischool

Independent Study Program

The English Academy

Student participation in planning new programs and in determining rules of discipline are other ways to reduce the suspension load. Students were involved in planning the Wingate programs. Spring Valley High School in Columbia, S.C., utilizes a student court to rule on any student appeal arising from penalties given for disruptive behavior.

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1. Wingate High School, Kingston Ave. and Winthrop St., Brooklyn, N.Y. 11203

Teacher inservice programs may also pay important dividends in better student attitudes and improved student conduct. The PASS[2] program (Positive Alternatives to Student Suspension) of the Pinellas County Schools, St. Petersburg, Fla., includes training sessions for all professional staff in values clarification, transactional analysis, and other behavioral science techniques. PASS programs also provide counseling to parents in communication and problem-solving skills so they may relate more effectively to their sons and daughters. The county believes that school atmosphere definitely has improved as a result of these training sessions.

Many school districts have found alternative programs or schools to be effective. An alternative school-within-school, HELP (Handling Educational and Learning Problems) Center of New Berlin, Wis., High School, has "helped" unmotivated, emotionally disturbed, and disruptive students to become successful learners.

The alternative program or school usually can be characterized by an emphasis upon individual programing. Individualized study, strong counseling programs, and concern for personal needs are all priorities within the typical alternative school. The goal is to motivate students to accept responsibility for their behavior and to respect themselves and others.

Flexibility and individualization are the two words which best characterize the alternative program approach. Students who work late at night may begin the school day in the late morning. If students work in the afternoon, they may attend classes in the morning. A strong emphasis is usually placed on work experience, community service, careers, and experiential learning. Individualized instruction is provided in academic and vocational subjects. Simulations, special interest projects, and field experiences are frequent learning experiences for students who find it difficult to achieve success in traditional learning situations.

Other elements contributing to successful alternative programs are (1) staff members who are concerned about each individual, (2) strong support of the community, (3) financial resources (alternative programs are not inexpensive), and (4) credit equivalent to that of school work in regular programs.

SOME PITFALLS

Not all "alternative to suspension" programs have succeeded. What are the characteristics of failing programs that practitioners should avoid as they implement alternatives in their own schools?

Avoid one cure-all program for all disruptive students with no consideration of individual student needs.

Avoid inconsistent and extreme enforcement (i.e., highly punitive or extremely flexible).

Avoid failing to educate students in program objectives.

Avoid underutilization of parents and community resources at program implementation.

Avoid overlooking staff development programs which focus upon skills for working with disruptive students.

2. Evaluators from USOE and NIE identified PASS as an exemplary program worthy of replication.

To Illustrate

DETENTION

Prior Lake Senior High School — Prior Lake, Minn. 55372
Dan A. Dahlgren, Principal

The "Continuing Education Center," staffed by a full-time teacher, provides a cooling-off period and helps students make a commitment to improve their behavior. At the Center students must write a behavior modification contract, continue with regular class assignments, and meet with counselors. Parents are informed of student progress.

The behavior contract includes: (1) statement of student goals in class; (2) statement of ways to reach these goals; (3) statement of assistance required; (4) statement of criteria used to determine whether or not the student is achieving the goals; (5) indication of the consequences for failure to live up to a contract. The contract is signed by the student, parent, teacher, counselor, and principal.

Central High School — 5400 First Ave.
Raymond H. Bailey, Assistant Principal-Dean — Evansville, Ind. 47710

An "In-Building Suspension" program provides alternative learning experiences that differ from activities of the regular classroom. These activities augment the educational program of the student.

Affective techniques are used, including extensive counseling involving suspended students, parents, teachers, counselors, school administrators, and community organizations. Also implemented are activities for the development of student self-concept including work with career clusters; exploratory experiences in self-awareness; rap sessions on attitudes, self-image, and goals for life; and values clarification. Guidance sessions promote interest in skill development and identify resources for dealing constructively with life situations. The program emphasizes that success is an important component of education.

Smith-Cotton Jr.-Sr. High School — Sedalia, Mo. 65301
Ken Keithly, Principal

The "Educational Adjustment Center" is staffed by a teacher with special training in counseling, remedial and developmental reading, and basic mathematics. The Center teacher coordinates the learning assignments for the students in the Center with the regular classroom teachers. In addition, students with reading problems are assisted with supplemental reading materials.

Students are referred to the Center by counselors or the principal as a result of severe classroom disruption or continual school policy violations. Some students spend minimal time in the Center, while others may be assigned for up to nine weeks. During assignment to the Center all privileges are rescinded so that students are motivated to work back into their regular programs.

Roosevelt High School
Tom Webb, Principal

2013 W. Third St.
Dayton, Ohio 45417

The in-school suspension program, "SHOP," consists of a Crisis Room and a Sharing and Caring Room. Students who violate the school rules can be assigned to the SHOP for anywhere from one class period to 10 days. Regular classroom assignments must continue to be completed by all SHOP students.

A student assigned to the SHOP is encouraged first to express his opinions and feelings, and then to construct alternatives for dealing with them. Individual counseling, group counseling, peer counseling—all are available in the SHOP.

The services of SHOP are not limited to seriously disruptive students. Any student with emerging problems may utilize the services of the Crisis Room or the Sharing and Caring Room to help in finding an acceptable solution.

INTERVENTION

Wilde Lake High School
John M. Jenkins, Principal

5460 Trumpeter Rd.
Columbia, Md. 21043

As an alternative to suspension Wilde Lake High School has developed a disciplinary system based on William Glasser's Reality Therapy. Teachers take responsibility for redirecting student misbehavior by conferring with the student immediately following a violation of school rules. Student violators are required to make an acceptable verbal or written plan for changing personal behavior. Failure to keep this commitment results in referral to a school planning room for a minimum of one day. There they must make specific written plans to change their behavior. The process is repeated as necessary. Students are sent home only when the rules of the planning room are not followed or when the health and welfare of other students are endangered.

The Reality Therapy disciplinary system places responsibility directly on students for improving unacceptable behavior. Wilde Lake reports that only a few students must return to the planning room once a plan is formulated and accepted by the teacher. Students appear to become more responsible for their behavior under this system, according to Principal John Jenkins.

Spring Valley High School
John H. Hodgens, Principal

Sparkleberry Lane
Columbia, S.C. 29206

Spring Valley High School has reduced the number of student suspensions and expulsions by utilizing five intervention strategies:

* A parent conference request is used in lieu of suspension. Parents are expected to come to school with the student on the day following misbehavior to discuss the problems and to seek solutions.

* Probation-suspension is given to students who ordinarily would be suspended but are not because their attitude is good

* A student supreme court rules on disciplinary actions appealed by students. If the court rules in support of the action the student is disciplined. If the student is judged innocent, the student receives no punishment. Also, the student supreme court may indicate guilt but recommend lenience by the administrator.

* Group counseling is optional for students who are suspended for the first time. The student choosing this alternative to suspension is assigned to a group headed by a guidance counselor. The group meets one period per week for six weeks.

* A "Time Out" program is designed to aid students who are having problems with the regular school curriculum. An individual program of study and therapy is designed for the student by an administrator, the parents, a regular teacher, school counselor, psychologist, and special teacher. Students work their way back into the regular program, but must remain in "Time Out" for a minimum of nine weeks.

Hughes High School
Lofell Williams, Principal

2515 Clifton Ave.
Cincinnati, Ohio 45219

A volunteer teacher-probation officer (TPO) program has been developed for the students of Hughes High School who have, through deviant behavior, become involved with the law and are under probation by Juvenile Court.

Volunteer probation officers include teachers, secretaries, custodians, aides, and administrators at Hughes. All are authorized officers of the juvenile court. Each is required to provide close supervision of the probationee in order to improve school and class attendance, to develop constructive behavior, to build self-concept, and to help with academic efforts. The TPO program includes:

- Pretesting the probationee to determine attitudes and feelings.
- Conferences with the probationee at school, at home, and in rap sessions with other probationees in the program, and with the juvenile court probation officer.
- Establishing a relationship with the probationee through participation in out-of-school recreational and educational experiences.
- Through grants to the school, jobs in the school are available to the probationee.
- A complete file of written records is maintained, including the TPO's comments regarding all contact with the probationee.
- At the option of the TPO, court appearances are made on behalf of the probationee.
- At the end of the probation period each probationee is posttested.

This program has contributed to staff growth and development as well as assisting students. Other schools in Cincinnati are initiating TPO programs.

Robin Mickle Junior High School — Lincoln, Nebr. 68507
Jack Peterson, Principal

At Mickle Junior High School, Glasser's Ten Steps to Discipline have been adopted within a broad program to improve school climate. Staff development workshops increase staff knowledge and effectiveness. A basic "plan sheet" outlines the Reality Therapy process for making students responsible for their own behavior. This instrument is used by teachers with students.

Plan Sheet

1. _____ _____ _____
student name — date — referring person

2. What is happening? What is the student doing?
   a. Physical behavior? What action is taking place?
   b. Verbal behavior? What are you saying?

3. How are these behaviors affecting your success? How is this behavior helping you?

4. Plan What will be done? What are you going to do now?

5. How will you know when this plan is working?
   a. How will I know when your plan is working?
   b. What should we do if the plan doesn't work?

6. I feel I can follow this plan. _____
student signature

7. Communicate to ____ Counselor ____ Initiator ____ Other _____
(Note: Do not use when either party is upset!)

Students who refuse to discuss and devise a plan are isolated from other students to consider the problems in a quiet setting. If need be, the student is sent home. Parents cooperate with the school by not punishing the child at home. Students return to school the next day and remain isolated until they are willing to design a plan for behavior change.

Papillion High School — Papillion, Nebr. 68046
Keith Pollard, Principal

The position of Community Relations Counselor was developed to coordinate school-community-court efforts in handling delinquent behavior. The responsibilities of the community counselor are broad:

Social Worker	Indications of child abuse, neglect, or extremely poor home conditions are referred to the CR counselor.
Court-Liaison	Students given a court-ordered school program are monitored by the counselor. He maintains student records, conducts school staffings, and keeps the court informed of student progress.
Juvenile Law Officer	Legal investigations at school are handled by the CR counselor as well as removal of students from school as a result of investigation by police.

Family Counselor — The CR counselor will attempt to resolve problems involving run-away youth or family conflict. Referrals to agencies such as juvenile court, social welfare, and mental health often result from these counseling efforts.

Other responsibilities of the job include: serving as a liaison between the school and social welfare and mental health agencies; and serving, upon request, as a neutral hearing officer in family/school disputes.

PREVENTION

Granite Alternative School
W. Scott Whipple, Principal
1690 W. 4800 S.
Salt Lake City, Utah 84107

The program at Granite High School is designed to help those students who have been unsuccessful in a traditional school setting. Students referred to Granite have varied problems including poor self-esteem, phobic reactions to large schools, drug involvement, and conflict with authority.

Curriculum is individualized. Optional times, places, groupings, and approaches for learning activities are offered. In addition to the regular day classes, community education classes are given in the evening. Students in the home study program are required to contact the school once a week to turn in assignments and receive needed help. Independent study offers credit for specialized projects; for example, car repair, home decorating, or a library project.

The improvement of the student's self-concept and image is a major goal of Granite High School. Continuous counseling for groups and individuals is provided by staff, counselors, and support personnel. Additional assistance comes from a social worker, a school psychologist, and a district juvenile court liaison person.

Credit is given for work experience when a student is also enrolled in a related vocationally-oriented class at school. Previously approved courses from cosmetology schools, business colleges, and technical schools also count for Granite graduation credit.

New Berlin High School
Robert Wiese, Principal
18695 W. Cleveland Ave.
New Berlin, Wis. 53151

The "Handling Educational and Learning Problems" (HELP) center is an alternative school within a school for the potential dropout, the disruptive student, and the slow learner. Two main objectives guide the program:

1. Provide basic education in math, science, social studies, and English.
2. Encourage socially acceptable behavior by providing opportunities for self-improvement and self-respect.

Students are referred to HELP by counselors, teachers, parents, and even by student self-referral. Once in the program, students receive help with "regular" classwork, teachers receive help from the team, or the student may be removed from his class and assigned to HELP for credited instruction.

According to reports from counselors, administrators, teachers, and the students themselves, there has been a noticeable decline in the dropout and suspension rate. There also has been an obvious improvement in student behavior and better rapport between teachers.

All Children's Hospital — 801 6th St., S.
Pupil Services Demonstration Project — St. Petersburg, Fla. 33701
Ralph E. Bailey, Director

The objective of "Positive Alternatives to Suspension" (PASS) is not only to reduce the number of students suspended from school, but also to decrease the number of students referred to administrative personnel as a result of unacceptable behavior.

The major activities of the program include:

- Establishing "time out" rooms managed by a trained teacher or paraprofessional who can listen to student problems. The listener aids students in forecasting consequences, exploring alternatives, and making decisions about future behavior.
- Having a social worker and school psychologist provide individual and group consultation sessions in which teachers learn values clarification, transactional analysis, and reality therapy in an attempt to create a "caring" school that meets the needs of students.
- Providing counseling in the form of a "school survival course" for students who have low self-concepts and experience frustration.
- Providing counseling to parents, assisting them in the development of communication and problem-solving skills.

This *Practitioner* was developed by Richard Stephens, research associate, and Scott Thomson, associate executive director of research for NASSP.

The illustrations used in this report came from schools responding to NASSP's annual questionnaire on exemplary programs. Appreciation is extended to these schools for their cooperation.

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